

Don't get tricked when buying Halloween treats

Written by Better Business Bureau
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If you're looking to buy or rent a fun Halloween costume this season, you're not alone. According to the National Retail Federation, a record 170 million Americans will spend close to \$8 billion on candy, pumpkins, decorations and costumes – both for them and for their pets. It's a holiday we love, and retailers respond to that with specialty stores that set up shop in October and are gone the minute Halloween is over. When shopping at seasonal Halloween stores, it's important to exercise caution. The Better Business Bureau of Minnesota and North Dakota (BBB) advises shoppers to read the fine print to avoid fly-by-night costume vendors.

Here are some BBB tips to make sure your Halloween stays "spooktacular" and you won't be haunted by impulse purchases:

Do your research. Many seasonal stores are run by reputable retailers who take advantage of short-term leases on vacant space to set up temporary stores to augment their permanent space, but other shops may be "there and gone." While it is always good to check out a company's BBB Business Review at bbb.org, some seasonal businesses change their name from one year to the next as a way of disguising a poor track record. Ask around and make sure you know with whom you're doing business.

Read the fine print. Just because it's a seasonal store doesn't mean that the store or the business backing it up doesn't have the same responsibilities as a year-round operation. Make sure to note the store's refund and return policies; familiarize yourself with all of the terms and conditions – they have to be made available.

Know what to expect before renting a costume. Rental costumes tend to be sturdier and more elaborate than the average Halloween costume, and you can often find something unique. Make sure you understand your responsibilities. What happens, for example, if the costume rips, or you get a stain on it or lose it altogether? Do you have to pay for the whole costume? What about the cleaning? Make sure everything is spelled out clearly in the rental agreement.

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If you're purchasing costumes online, do it securely. Check a site's security settings. If the site is secure, its URL (web address) should start with "https://." You also may see a small picture of a closed lock in the lower right corner of the screen.

For more helpful consumer tips, visit www.bbb.org/us/Consumer-Tips/ .

The mission of the is to be the leader in building marketplace trust by promoting, through self-regulation, the highest standards of business ethics and conduct, and to instill confidence in responsible businesses through programs of education and action that inform, assist and protect the general public. Our hours of operation are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Contact the BBB at bbb.org or 651-699-1111, toll-free at 1-800-646-6222. Visit our Centennial website at bbbis100.org .